

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9595

INFO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

COMUSMACTHAI BANGKOK

USSAG/7TH AF NAKHON PHANOM TH

CINCPAC HONOLULU

JCS WASH DC

S E C R E T BANGKOK 0278

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, MASS, MILI, TH

SUBJ: RICE FOR CAMBODIA: AIRDROP SUPPLY

REF: (A) STATE 002284; (B) BANGKOK 0130

1. WE REGRET THAT THE DEPARTMENT DID NOT RECEIVE ANY OF THE REFERENCED MESSAGES IN REFTEL B AND HAVE HAD THEM RETRANSMITTED FOR YOUR INFORMATION.

2. ALTHOUGH THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE HAS EXPRESSED NO OBJECTION TO THE TRANSHIPMENT OF RICE, THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE, WHO CONTROLS THE PORT, APPEARS TO BE UNSWERVING IN THEIR DETERMINATION THAT WE BUY THAI RICE. ON 23 DECEMBER I, ALONG WITH COMUSMACTHAI AND MY POLITICAL-MILITARY COUNSELOR, CALLED ON MINISTER OF DEFENSE KHRUAN. AMONG THE TOPICS DISCUSSED WAS RICE. I EXPRESSED MY DEEP CONCERN OVER THE OBSTACLES PLACED IN

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THE WAY OF TRANSSHIPMENT OF RICE, AND REMINDED THE

MINISTER THAT THE SUPPORT OF CAMBODIA WAS IN OUR MUTUAL INTEREST. I ALSO MADE NOTE OF THE FACT THAT THE TWO OTHER MINISTRIES CONCERNED WERE NOT OPPOSED TO THE OPERATION AND THAT IF THE MOD WOULD GRANT ITS APPROVAL THE PROBLEM WOULD BE SOLVED. KHRUAN REPLIED THAT MOD HAD CLEARED 700 TONS OF RICE THEN AT THE PORT, BUT WOULD GIVE NO COMMITMENT ON BLANKET AUTHORIZATION FOR FUTURE SHIPMENTS. I PLAN TO RAISE THIS QUESTION AGAIN WITH KHRUAN WHEN UNDERSECRETARY OF STATE MAW AND I CALL ON HIM JANUARY 9. I HAVE ALSO COVERED THIS GROUND WITH FOREIGN MINISTER CHARUNPHAN WHO DOES NOT SEEM INCLINED TO BE HELPFUL. HIS ONLY COMMENT WAS THAT THE BEST SOLUTION WOULD BE TO BUY THAI RICE. A DISCUSSION WITH THE THAI CHARGE, OR THE AMBASSADOR WHEN HE RETURNS, BY THE DEPARTMENT WOULD REINFORCE OUR EFFORTS.

3. IN ANSWER TO YOUR SPECIFIC QUESTIONS, THE ORIGINAL PL-480 RICE TRANSSHIPPED THROUGH THAILAND FOR AIRDROP IN CAMBODIA COMMENCED ON MARCH 5, 1974 (PHNOM PENH 4470). THIS RICE WAS BACKHAULED VIA USAF C-130'S FROM PHNOM PENH TO U-TAPAO. THERE IT WAS OFFLOADED, RIGGED FOR PARA-DROP AND FLOWN BACK FOR DROPS OVER CAMBODIAN ENCLAVES. PRIOR TO THIS USAID/CAMBODIA PURCHASED THAI RICE FOR USAF AIRDROPS IN CAMBODIA. HOWEVER, OWING TO THE QUANTITIES NEEDED AND THE HIGH PRICE OF RICE ON THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET, THE THAI CEASED SELLING TO USAID/CAMBODIA FOR THIS OPERATION.

4. WORKING WITH USSAG, EFFORTS WERE MADE BY THIS EMBASSY TO FIND A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO THE EXPENSIVE USAF RICE BACKHAUL. IN EARLY MAY ETO CONVOYS BEGAN THE BACKHAUL OF BATTAMBANG RICE, TRANSSHIPPED THROUGH THAILAND, FOR AIRDROPS OUT OF U-TAPAO. HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF EXCESSIVE ETO RATES AND HIGH BATTAMBANG RICE MARKET PRICES WHICH HAD TO BE BORNE BY USAID/CAMBODIA, THIS PROVED TOO COSTLY AN ALTERNATIVE. IN MID-MAY 1974, THE BATTAMBANG BACKHAUL WAS PHASED-OUT AND PL-480, BROUGHT DIRECT TO SATTAPHI BY BARGE, HAS BEEN USED. IN REF B WE HAVE ASKED PHNOM PENH TO EXPLORE AGAIN THE POSSIBILITY OF USING BATTAMBANG RICE.

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5. PARA 3 OF REFTTEL B REFERS TO EFFORTS BY USAID/CAMBODIA TO SEEK AND OBTAIN A FAA WAIVER FOR THE PURCHASE OF THAI RICE, SHOULD THAT BECOME UNAVOIDABLE. WE RECOGNIZE THAT, GIVEN THE RICE SURPLUS IN THE UNITED STATES, SUCH A WAIVER MAY BE DIFFICULT TO SECURE. CONGRESSMAN PASSMAN ADVISED EMBOFF ON JANUARY 5 IN BANGKOK THAT HE WAS UNALTERABLY OPPOSED TO PURCHASE OF ANY THAI RICE FOR ANY PURPOSE. WE WILL CONTINUE OUR EFFORTS BUT IT WOULD BE PRUDENT ON A

CONTINGENCY BASIS TO PLAN FOR THE PURCHASE OF THAI RICE FOR
THE CAMBODIAN AIRDROP, IF ALL OTHER EFFORTS FAIL.
KINTNER

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